

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

A Lad Who Was Office Boy to a Wizard and Learned a Lot of His Hidden Secrets

TOMMY FRAME was office boy to a wizard. He secured the position by a funny accident. He caught cold and lost his voice so that the doctor told him not to go to school for a week, and while he was playing with a lot of boys old Gormley, the wizard, came along, and seeing that he didn't shout or yell like the rest of the boys, stopped him as he ran past and asked:

"Hi, boy; can't you talk?"

Tommy shook his head, but, of course, did not reply otherwise.

"Are you deaf, also?" asked the wizard. "No, of course not," he added.

But Tommy, just for a joke, nodded his head affirmatively, and the surprised wizard said:

"But how do you know what I am saying to you if you are deaf?"

Tommy, who could hardly keep from laughing, made signs that he knew from the motion of the man's mouth just what he was saying, and as Wizard Gormley had often heard of that curious practice of the deaf and dumb, he immediately concluded that Tommy was one of that unfortunate class and he went on to say:

"I need a smart boy in my office, and you will just suit me. I will give you three dollars a week."

Tommy, to carry the joke farther, although he had not the slightest intention of accepting the offer, took out a pencil and paper and wrote:

"What do I have to do for the three dollars?"

"Oh, not much. Run errands and open the door for my customers. I am a lawyer, you see, and I am a very busy man."

"I will come and see you to-morrow after I ask my uncle," Tommy wrote, and then the man handed him a card with these words printed upon it:

ASMODEUS X. GORMLEY,
PSYCHOJURIC COUNSELLOR AND
PROTOPLASMIC ADVISER
13 Cosmos Terrace, Green Street.

Tommy took the card and ran away, for he could not keep his face from betraying him, but when he reached home he no longer felt mischievous, for there he found that the uncle with whom he lived had just died. The poor boy was now left without a friend in the world, for he had lost his parents some years before, and this uncle had been his only relation.

What to do he knew not, but after the funeral, when the woman who owned the house in which the two had lived told him that unless he could pay board he must leave, he remembered the old man's offer and to him he went at once, carrying a slate, however, on which to write, for he knew that unless he kept up the fiction of being deaf and dumb he could not secure or keep the position.

Now, old Gormley merely pretended to be a lawyer in order to avert the curiosity of his neighbors and prevent questions being asked.

Many a lawyer has pretended before this to be a wizard, but this was doubtless the first time a real wizard made believe to be a lawyer, and almost everybody around Cosmos Terrace thought the old man really was what he pretended to be, but hundreds of people knew him for the greatest and most adept of conjurers and magicians, whose magic spells were marvelous in their potency.

So many callers came every day that he really needed a boy, since the little dwarf who used to open the door had died; and the idea of a deaf and dumb boy, who wouldn't be forever listening at the keyhole, as the dwarf had done, was very pleasant. He smiled a warm welcome when Tommy appeared and wrote on his slate that he wanted the job.

He showed Tommy his rooms, told him he must dust the dried crocodiles, bats, lizards, owls, stuffed snakes and toads that stood or hung all about the dimly-lighted rooms with their green eyes glaring at him, keep the books all neatly arranged, bring coal for the grate, fill the lamps, make the beds, wind the clock and tend the door. When people came asking for a lawyer he was to tell them that Mr. Gormley was far too busy to bother about any more clients, but when they asked to see the Protoplasmic Adviser, or even, said he, should they happen to ask for the wizard, admit them at once. "You will sleep down here on the sofa," he added, "for many people come to see me long after midnight—in fact, at all hours—and you must sleep where you will feel them knocking, as you can't hear."

"And remember," he said, "last of all, but most important, never tell anybody what you see here in this house, or evil will befall you, evil that will be far worse than being deaf and dumb!"

Tommy nodded as if nothing was farther from his thoughts, but inwardly he trembled at the idea of being office boy to a wizard, which, it was very plain, was the old man's profession.

However, it was a means of his making a living, he thought, and he made up his mind to remain as deaf as an adder and as dumb as an oyster, which at present was not difficult, for his voice was still gone. He sat down in a chair by the door, where he could look out of a narrow side window and see who came on the stoop.

At noon the wizard sent him to a restaurant for luncheon, and Tommy saw that he would get enough to eat and was happy. He admired the old man's taste, too, for he ordered two ham sandwiches, five cream puffs, two napoleons and a pie for lunch. Tommy saw that life in that house would certainly be worth living; besides, he realized that many wonderful things might happen there, too, and as he was aware that an office boy generally learns a great deal about the business with which he is connected, he determined to pick up any stray bits of wizardly knowledge that he might get hold of.

Many a strange man and woman came to that house, and, as all considered Tommy deaf and dumb, they never hesitated to talk before him, although all turned their backs so that he could not see their lips move, as the wizard bade them, which often caused the boy to almost choke to death as he tried to restrain his grins.

Wonderful things he heard; awful plots were hatched there for the undoing of men and even kingdoms, for people came to see Wizard Gormley even from Arabia, Hungary, Mesopotamia, Thibet, Burma and Heligoland. Pundits from the Punjab in India, seers from Persia, magi from Siam, adepts from Atlantic City, clairvoyants from Harlem and Patterson and palmists from Palmyra came to him; men of all ranks, plenipotentiaries, ambassadors, khans, rajahs, rabbis, legates, regents, pashas, dons, grand commanders, deans, muftis, ad-

mirals, effendis and corporals all flocked to see the mysterious man, and they all bowed humbly before Tommy seeking admittance, but that never made him feel proud at all.

He was not like most office boys; he had sense. The wizard had a library of books, which after a time he allowed the boy to read; at least he permitted him to select certain volumes, but gradually he became careless and Tommy managed to read many of his most cherished books of magic, containing recipes for spells and charms of the greatest potency, so the books said, but nearly all that he read seemed like the veriest humbug to Tommy.

Fleas' legs, toads' eyelashes, snakes' tears, cats' whiskers, elephants' hairs, bats' claws, snakes, lizards' scales, angeworms' blood, bees' tongues and flies' knee-joints seemed to him to be silly objects to use in summoning the demons of magic, but such seemed to be the most frequently used. Still, he diligently studied all he gained a chance to read of these books, thinking it all might come in handy some time.

He used to practice on the cat sometimes when his master was absent, and I must say some of the dreadful-sounding spells which he used drove her almost into fits. But nothing worse or more important ever happened, and he supposed that he had made some mistake or other in pronouncing the words. When you think of it, such words as "Agrollopinarotopious" or "Dillimazopholi," both of which were in these books, might easily be mispronounced by anybody.

The wizard had many curious little boxes containing Hindoo machinery that whizzed and buzzed inside, and these Tommy often tried to experiment with, but never succeeded in getting them to go, and he finally came to the conclusion that they held bugs or something that only Gormley could start off.

Bottles of many-colored fluids were everywhere in the closets, but Tommy, although he often tried, never could induce the cat to take any of the contents of these. The wizard often gave little phials of these fluids to his visitors, and after a time Tommy arrived at the conclusion that they were poisons, but he now had been so long with the wizard that he considered it none of his business whom his master poisoned as long as he still bought cream-cakes, pie, doughnuts, bolivars and ice cream for every meal. Much can be forgiven a kind master.

One winter night, after Tommy had been asleep with the cat snuggled close to him for more than two hours, he heard a gentle knock upon the door and opened it to admit a woman whose face was fearsome and awful.

Mr. Gormley appeared at once and greeted his visitor with great ceremony, calling her "his dear Mrs. Niteskiter" and "most wonderful wizardess," as well as "mighty enchantress" and "dear student of the Occult," whatever that means, and Tommy saw at once that she must be somebody very important indeed.

She looked hard at him, but his master whispered to her that he was but "a poor deaf and dumb thing with few wits about him," and then Tommy knew that something was to be heard. The two went into Mr. Gormley's private consulting-room and Tommy laid his ear to the door at once.

Mrs. Niteskiter, who was a famous witch from a far-distant country, explained why she had called at such an hour. She said she had in her charge a beautiful girl, the daughter of the Emperor of Buchu, who had been carried away by the chief cook of the palace, a man who wished her to marry his son and who hoped to thus compel the Emperor's consent; but now, mighty magicians having been employed by the Emperor to seek her, the witch feared that she might at any moment be discovered and taken away, thus depriving her of a large sum of money every year.

She had tried all her arts to guard the beautiful girl, but she was in great fear of losing her by some new and unknown trick. She confessed that all her contrivances were pretty old and out-of-date, and

wished Mr. Gormley to put her up to some new dodges.

At present the girl was guarded by an old and faithful dragon, hideous enough and fierce, too, but his teeth were nearly all gone and he couldn't spit out enough fire to light the gas, she said.

"You ought to have no fear," said Gormley. "One with your wonderful control of Nature's forces! For two hundred years you have defied every rival."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Gormley! I am only a hundred and forty-nine!" cried Mrs. Niteskiter.

"Yes, a mere girl!" replied the wizard. "Indeed, you seem much younger, but now let us see what can be done. You are afraid they may overcome you. You are afraid of the gas, she said. Last time I saw him, he seemed very lively and fierce. Nearly got me, and, indeed, I remember that I lost the right tail of my coat because I was a trifle slow in getting out of your front yard."

The witch smiled and said: "He always was a playful fellow, but now he is getting rusty in his joints. He guards the girl very well, but I am afraid of some of these new animals, the rambunctious, the skink-like or the rasmatag, that I hear about now and then in the papers."

"All inventions, my dear madam, of an impaired imagination. I don't believe in any of them. But we will make safe by placing her beyond danger."

"Now, don't think that I'll let her out of my hands," cried the witch excitedly. "I shall never part with her."

"You need not. We will change her into a goldfish in a bowl! That will make her secure enough. I think. A fish she shall be; that is, a fish by day but a girl by night, for not even my art can make her a fish or anything else all the time."

"How is this to be done?" asked the witch, and Tommy flattened himself to the door in his eagerness to hear the reply.

"Here is the charm. You begin by saying—"

Just then Tommy bumped against the door and both of them heard the slight noise. He sprang away as he heard the wizard rising, and when Gormley opened the door Tommy was fast asleep, apparently, at the end of the hall, so he shut the door and said: "Must have been the cat, for the boy is asleep."

After that he was constantly on the lookout for the recipe in his master's books, but the nearest he came to it was a spell, short and very silly in sound, that was guaranteed to undo any and all magic changes of the sort; provided, however, that it was uttered in the light of a full moon. When he came upon this is occurred to him that it would be a good spell to learn by heart, as, after all, it might come in handy some time.

Of course he was too young to think of deliberately seeking out the Emperor's daughter and rescuing her, for he knew that was a deed for a hero, but some time, perhaps, when he grew up, he might come upon such another poor girl and save her from a witch. So he promptly wrote down the spell, which went:

HORUM KORUM WEEZER WHAM,
INER PINER DICKORA GAMM;
EENY PEENY TINTRY KLOO,
C. O. D. O. K. I. O. U.

He went about repeating this to himself until it became a habit, and several times, as he muttered it almost audibly, the wizard shouted at him and asked him if he was trying to talk, but fortunately old Gormley was himself growing very deaf and so he never overheard his office boy, else there would have been trouble then and there.

One day a magnificent carriage stopped at the door and a man attired in furs entered. He was the Prime Minister of the Emperor of Buchu, and he had come to ask for Wizard Gormley's help in finding the lost Princess. Gormley was all smiles, and assured him that he certainly would assist him in every way possible, but that it would take some time to learn where she was secreted.

Tommy now heard the name of the Princess, which was Editha Celina Alberta Mora Adeline Violet Augusta. It sounded to him like one of the

acrostics they give prizes for in the papers, but still it gave him some idea of what an important person a princess is. He also wrote all the names down on the same paper with his favorite spell. The Minister went away, having secured many fine promises from Gormley, none of which, as Tommy knew, would be performed, for he was really in league with Witch Niteskiter.

At night the wizard was taken sick suddenly, and, as morning dawned cold and pale, he told Tommy that unless he could get some medicine from Mrs. Niteskiter before the next day he would be dead. Tommy said that he would go after it at once, or, rather, he wrote to that effect on his slate, and the wizard, after thinking awhile, told him to get ready. It took Tommy only five minutes, and then, after receiving the directions for the journey, hurried away. It took the train four hours to reach the town in which she dwelt, and he hastened at once to her house, which he knew by its tall stoop of brass, for of this the wizard had told him. He rang the bell half expecting to see the dragon waiting on the door, but the witch opened it herself. Tommy wrote out his message and waited in the hall while she went for the medicine. He peeped into the parlor, but saw no goldfish anywhere. He listened, hoping to hear the dragon snort, but beyond scenting a sort of burnt smell, he discovered no clue as to where the dread creature was kept.

He went away with the medicine, filled with a deep regret at not seeing the dragon, but, of course, he dared not ask the witch anything about it; yet he was overjoyed that at last he knew where the Emperor's daughter with the full list of names was confined. When he returned to his home he found old Gormley at his last gasp, but he eagerly grabbed the witch's medicine and gulped it down.

It finished him in a twinkling, for it was deadly poison that she had sent him purposing to destroy him, because he shared her secret. He turned green as grass in a minute, and Tommy knew that he was done for, so he ran for a real doctor. It was of no use. He was stone dead.

And Tommy was out of a job.

But after a few days he discovered that the wizard had no relations at all, and he determined to continue the business himself. Therefore he had some cards printed as follows:

TOMMY FRAME,
Successor to Wizard Gormley.

OCCULT PROPHET & MYSTIC SEER.

FORTUNES TOLD AND SPELLS SOLD.

Come Early and Avoid the Rush!

13 Cosmos Terrace.

And the same he put in all the papers, as well. Somehow, in spite of his cutting cards and his newspaper advertising, Tommy did very little business, because all the customers who came looked at him once and then went away muttering: "Too young!" He soon realized that a wizard without wrinkles and a long white beard could do little with such people, and pretty soon he had used up all the money that Gormley had left in his desk, so he felt obliged to give up trying to win.

After a day of starvation, for he did not like to run into debt at the cake-shop, he decided to apply to the old witch Niteskiter for a position as office boy, private secretary or night watchman, any of which would suit him, and he felt qualified for all of them.

As he had spent all his money he had to walk to Timbaltown, where she lived, and he arrived there footsore and hungry but confident.

She looked at him in pretended surprise when he appeared at her door and wrote on his slate that his master was dead and buried, but she could not avoid showing her joyful relief. After he had asked her for a position she reflected for a time, and finally said that he might attend to her furnace for the rest of the winter, but in the spring, she said, she was going to Atlantic City, where the people believe in witches and spooks and where money is plenty,

How He Turned His Knowledge to Good Account and Rescued a Beautiful Princess

In her employ Tommy found that life was not all roses, nor was pie a frequent visitor to that house. He now regretted the death of Gormley more than ever. As I have said, Mrs. Niteskiter had a brass stoop, brass every bit of it, steps, rails and all, and Tommy was ordered to polish it and keep it polished, although it was as green as grass when he arrived.

It was not long before Tommy became acquainted with the mangy old dragon, although he never saw the goldfish until he had obtained admission into the dragon house, which was in the rear, where the animal remained neatly coiled up all the time.

It came about in this way: The dragon had complained of being awfully bothered by fleas, and dragon-fleas, as you may perhaps know, are far bigger and bite harder than ordinary fleas, and Tommy had advised the use of insect-powder. When the dragon begged him to get some Tommy took some of his own money and bought ten bottles. He scattered the yellow dust well over the dragon, who almost sneezed his head off in the cloud that was formed, but it killed every flea in a twinkling.

You may be sure the dragon had none but the kindest feeling for Tommy after that, and he allowed him to enter his house at any time, so that he soon saw the beautiful goldfish slowly swimming about in a big bowl. He never said anything about the girl, although he knew that at night she took her own shape, for the dragon never allowed him to enter after dark. Of course he often thought of the "Horum korum" spell, but as it was useless except at full moon he never dreamed of saying it.

One day the witch was at home and happened to pick up one of Tommy's business cards.

"Why, that's a neat card," she cried. "Who got it up?"

"I did," replied the boy, forgetting himself for a moment.

"Why, you can talk!" she cried.

"Yes; somehow my voice came to me this morning, after eating raw onions," replied Tommy.

"There must be some magic in onions," she cried. "I'll look into it. But, say, you seem to be pretty smart; perhaps you can devise a scheme to make business pick up a little. I am running behind dreadfully lately."

"You ought to advertise," said Tommy. "Get your picture in the papers and have people talk about you."

"I never had my picture taken," she said thoughtfully.

"I have Gormley's camera upstairs," said Tommy. "I'll take it. I have an idea! Why not have a picture of yourself standing by the dragon? Yes, and better still, right in the dragon's open mouth! That will make people talk. All the papers will be glad to print it, I am sure!"

So that night, the witch having hidden the Princess in the cellar, they went out to the dragon-house and she climbed up and stood in his open mouth trying to look as pleasant as possible.

Tommy arranged his camera, fixed the focus, drew aside the slide and then lighted the flashlight which lay piled up in a tin plate on the table. It went off with a dazzling, blinding sizz, and so great, so sudden was the flash that the frightened dragon gulped in terror, and before he could catch his breath he swallowed Mrs. Niteskiter!

For a moment he choked and gasped, trying hard to cough her up again, but the effort was useless. She was down for good and all! The dragon looked guiltily at Thomas, but the boy said:

"It's all right, Poppkins!" (That was the dragon's name.) "She's gone, and good riddance to her. Don't try any more to get her up or you may injure your esophagus. Deep cool and try to digest her."

"How about that girl?" asked the dragon suddenly. "She's in the cellar."

"Call her up," said Tommy, and when the Princess came up, in fear and trembling, she was amazed to see a handsome boy instead of the dread witch. Tommy told her what had happened and she wept for joy.

"Now I can go home, I hope!" she said.

"The dragon looked at Tommy, who at once said: "Sure! You go home just as soon as I can make the spell work to change you into a girl all the time."

"And you are a wizard, too?" cried the dragon.

"The best ever," returned Tommy, "and the greatest changer you ever saw. I could turn you into an old hay-wagon right now if I wanted to."

The dragon trembled so that his iron scales rattled, but he could not speak. Tommy led the Princess into the house and told her she was to be his mistress until he could manage to fix things, but they sat talking until the sun rose, and suddenly she changed into a goldfish, so suddenly that he had to hurry to get her into the bowl before she died. Then he happened to look out of the window, and lo! there was the full moon shining pale and white in the western sky. Instantly he said:

HORUM KORUM WEEZER WHAM,

INER PINER DICKORA GAMM;

EENY PEENY TINTRY KLOO,

C. O. D. O. K. I. O. U.

The bowl fell to the floor with a crash, and there stood the Princess Editha lovelier than ever! They shook hands, and just then the dragon stuck his head in, saying:

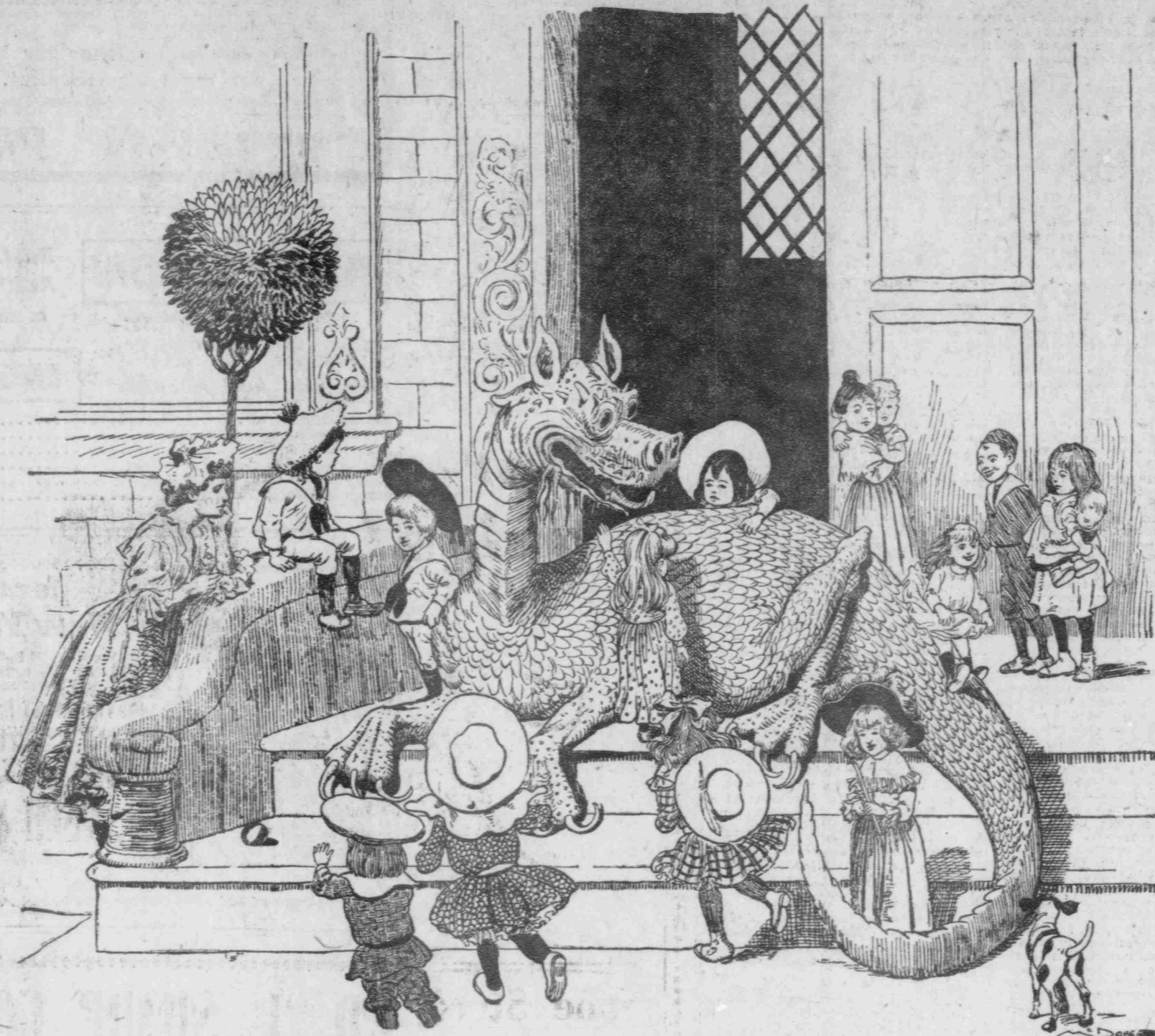
"Good morning! I've thought over your plan and it's all right! We will start a circus!"

So that's what they did, traveling at last all the way to Buchu, where Editha was restored to her father, who made Tommy a General and a Grand Duke as well, and they built a gorgeous gilded house for the dragon, as those creatures were once worshipped in that land and are still much respected.

The dragon used to sit out on the steps of the house and all the children used to play with him, for he was very good-natured and amiable.

They climbed all over him and made a toboggan-slide of his smooth, shining tail down the steps, crawled into his great mouth and even stuck their fingers in his eyes without making him complain, for he dearly loved children. Afterward, when Tommy grew up and married Editha, he came to live with them, and, for all I know, he may be with them still. Tommy is now the Emperor of Buchu, and all of his people adore him because he drove out all the wizards and witches from the land and taught the children that they were all humbugs and impostors.

WALT McDUGALL.



THE OLD DRAGON BECAME SO TAME THAT THE CHILDREN PLAYED WITH HIM